

[F. J. Elliott]

[?] MSS Not in [Folk?] S - 241 - SaL

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

NAME OF WORKER George Hartman ADDRESS 2438 W. Lincoln, Nebr.

DATE November 26, 1938 SUBJECT Folklore

1. Name and address of informant F. J. Elliott
2. Date and time of interview Wilbur, Nebr., Nov. 26
3. Place of interview Wilbur, Nebr.
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant None
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you None
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Lives in a small home, alone. Old fashioned, but comfortable. C. 15 2/27/41 - Neb.

Form B Personal History of Informant

NAME OF WORKER George Hartman ADDRESS 2430 W. Lincoln, Nebr.

DATE November 26, 1938 SUBJECT Folklore

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT F. J. Elliott, Wilbur, Nebr.

1. Ancestry

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2. Place and date of birth Iowa, 1861
3. Family None
4. Place and date of birth
5. Education, with dates Primary school
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates Printer, newspaper work, farmer.
7. Special skills and interests
8. Community and religious activities Latter Day Saints
9. Description of informant Tall, weatherbeaten face
10. Other points gained in interview

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

NAME OF WORKER George Hartman ADDRESS 2438 W. Lincoln

DATE November 26, 1938 SUBJECT Folklore

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT F. G. Elliott, Wilbur, Nebraska

Wild Bill Hickok- [McCaules?] Affair

By F. G. Elliott

For a long time now many people have been very much interested in getting the straight of this, famous mixup of the long ago, which occurred at the old McCaules home just southeast of what is now Fairbury, on July 11, 1861.

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We, like others, were interested too and for some time have been gathering every account we could get, talked to people who's father and mother lived there at the time, visited the scene of the conflict several times and read old history, but for all that the absolute certainty of the facts are [?] and our honest opinion is that the real facts never will be known.

The last living witness of the affair, William McCaules, a son of the one killed was then 12 years of age (He, too, has just passed on). Just a few years ago he first brought out the story as he told it. In our opinion his waiting until all those who knew the facts and the character of these two men, had passed on, has hurt his story we believe.

The ones who take the other side are all honest upright people. They get their story from their fathers and mothers who knew both McCaules and Will Bill.

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The sons and daughters of McCanles are fine people we do not wish to hurt them, neither do the folks who know them, they say Wild Bill was a good law abiding man but all say McCanles was a bad man.

The first account of the affair we take from an old history published about 1882, the author says: "The facts are from S. C. Jenkins and S. J. Alexander, who arrived at the ranch within two hours after the trouble took place and before the bodies were removed and from many others, and reports of Wild Bill's trail.

The facts the author gives are these: Wild Bill at this time was tending stock for the Ben Holiday State Company at Rock Creek station. James McCanles, once owner of the station did not have an enviable reputation, was a southern sympathizer and was trying to raise a company to assist the south. He came to Wild Bill and tried to persuade him to join and turn over the stage company's stock. On his refusal, McCanles threatened to kill him and take the stock. That afternoon McCanles returned with three other men and started

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to enter the house. Wild Bill shot him. Two of the other men were killed, one got away. At Wild Bill's trial, which was held in Beatrice, no one appeared against him. His plea was self-defence and he was cleared. The historian closed with the following: "It was evident that the design of the men was to take Wild Bill's life or it is most probably that the man who got away would have appeared against Wild Bill at the trial."

The story of the affair as told by Wm. McCanles, Jr., son of David McCanles, killed by Wild Bill, appeared in the Fairbury Journal of Sept, 25, 1930, states this: "Probably the motive for killing was fear. Father had told Mrs. Wellman to tell her husband to come out [?] [?] Wellmans' were the folks 3 who lived there and kept the station) she said he wouldn't and father said if he wouldn't come out he would go in and drag him out. I think rather than be man-handled, he killed father." It would seem McCanles intends to pound up Wellman. When he said if he didn't come out he would go in and drag him out. This brings out a point that justified the killing of McCanles when he started to force his way into another man's home.

This part of the story by Wm. McCanles bears out the stories told around Fairbury by those who parents knew David McCanles that he was brutal, overbearing. Now the question comes up why did not William McCanles, Jr. appear against Wild Bill at the trial? He was an eye witness and perhaps 12 years of age.

We had a long talk with a man who's name we can not now recall. His folks were neighbors of the McCanles family. Mrs. McCanles often visited with his folks, he had often heard her speak of the affair, she never blamed Wild Bill. Told about Kate Shell who lived at the west station, and kept a store, sold food supplies and whiskey to those going over the old Oregon trail. Mrs. McCanles did not like her but ever once in a while she had to get up a dinner and invite Kate over, then Kate would have a big dinner and McCanles would have to go over there, just had to go!

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A while ago, a writer for the Dearborn Independent, Henry Ford's paper wrote up the whole affair, told a lot about the part Kate played and there were never any denials.

Then about the toll bridge. We visited the place where it stood, only a few stones are left now. The logs of which it was made had crumbled to dust or been carried away. Rock Creek is just a little stream and in [?] crossing one hardly knew that they had crossed a creek. It wasn't a bad place at all just a little work without a bridge would have made it far better than hundreds of other places on the old trail that they had to cross. But the toll charged for crossing brought in a lot of money to McCanles. To the north a little ways was a good crossing but if the travellers attempted to cross there some one would appear with a gun and insist that they were trespassing and they would have to go back and pay to cross the bridge.

Out in Cannon City, Colorado, where an old friend of ours lives, is a [?], [?] Blancett by name, who's father had a station on the Oregon Trail farther east from the McCanles station. He knew both Wild Bill and McCanles and knew of the Wild Bill, McCanles affair. Later he became a plainsman and a scout. To help pass the time away, he tells of his early day experiences to a friend who writes them up for a Colorado paper, The Sunday Post. In one of the articles appears the following:

"In 1860, my father, my brothers and I were keeping the stage station at Ashpoint, Kansas. He said Wild Bill was inclined to be reticent, talked little of himself or about others, he was a man of action not words. His duty was to guard the cash box on the coach that carried it. I never saw him without his feet off this box. This box was the particular trust of the guard and he was under orders to guard it with his life. Bill handled a pistol with the speed of lightning. When talking, wishing to emphasize something he had a way of throwing his right or left hand towards you with the trigger finger pointed at you. His hands moved with incredible swiftness and I believe he practiced this mannerism with such purpose that it became a part of his nature and probably resulted in making him the fastest two-gun man of his day. He was not a wanton killer and used his guns only in line of duty. He had

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plenty of opportunity to kill oftener than he did, knowing that he could start a graveyard at any time and the government would pay all funeral expenses. We never knew him to be intoxicated and never knew him to kill but one man except in line of duty. The exception was a man names McCanles who kept the Rock Creek Station near the little Blue river. The two men got into a dispute, no one seems to know for sure and Bill drew his gun first. My father and McCanles were friends and were both station keepers. In closing, Mr. Blancett says: "Anyone who wanted to make the acquaintance of Wild Bill, and would mind their own business, not get too inquisitive, would find him a perfect gentleman in every way. In those days he was not known as "Wild Bill", that name did not become general until in the early 70's at which time I had lost track of him."

From the Fairbury Journal of sometime ago we take the following: George [?]. Jenkins of Bellingham, Washington was in Fairbury this week accompanied by his wife visiting places of interest with which he was familiar in an early day. Mr. Jenkins is a son of the late [??.?] Jenkins, who came through here in 1858 and brought his family out here to live in 1859, remaining until 1884. His family was the first to permanently locate in this country. George [?]. Jenkins was born in the house where Wild Bill killed McCanles, year of birth, 1864. His father [?]. C. Jenkins, were the second county superintendent of schools, Justice of the Peace and county commissioner and member of the Legislature. Referring to the McCanles tragedy he recalls hearing his father and mother tell about it many times. Jenkins says his father told him McCanles had made threats to run off livestock from the ranches of the settlers for the benefit of the Confederacy and that 6 the settlers were organized to resist such attempts, that his mother expressed extreme relief when the news reached them that McCanles had been killed, that his father helped bury the bodies of McCanles, Woods and Gordon, what the talk always was at the Jenkin's home that McCanles was a wild reckless man and a Southern sympathizer."

Another story published in the DeWitt Times News, a few years ago covers a little different phase and was told by the foreman of the state stations.

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This man tells it about this way: "At the time of this affair I was at a station farther west and reached this station just as Wild Bill was getting ready to go to Beatrice for his trial. He wanted me to /go with him and as we started on our way imagine my surprise and uncomfortable feeling when he announced his intention of stopping at the McCanles home. I would have rather been some where else, but Bill stopped. He told Mrs. McCanles he was sorry he had to kill her man then took out \$35.00 and gave her saying: "This is all I have, sorry I do not have more to give you." We drove on to Beatrice and at the trail, his plea was self-defence, no one appeared against him and he was cleared. The trial did not last more than fifteen minutes.

From an old history of La Salle County, Illinois we take the following: [W?]. A. Hickok, father of Wild Bill came here from Grand Isle County, Vermont to Union Grove, [?] County, Illinois in 1833, June 16, 1834, to Baileys point with Rev [?]. Gould and Isaac Fredenburg then to Troy Grove, La Salle county in Nov. 1836, was deacon of the Presbyterian church, opened the first store kept at Homer. He was a worthy man and died may 5, 1852. 1852

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His widow, a much respected woman and three sons were left, Lorenzo, Hiram and Bill. James P. "Wild Bill," born and raised at Troy Grove became notorious on the western frontier and won the name of "Wild Bill." A man over six feet tall, lithe and active. He was more than a match for the roughs he met on the debatable ground between civilized and savage life and is said to have often killed his man; at one time he is said to have killed four men in 60 seconds—they were on his track seeking his life. He served with Jim Lane in the Kansas troubles. Was elected constable while a miner in Kansas. Was for two years U. S. Marshall at Abilene, Kansas and was regarded as a very efficient and reliable officer. He was killed at Deadwood, S. D. August 2, 1876 while playing cards. His assailant came silently behind him and shot him in the head. His murderer was tried by a mob jury and acquitted, but later was arrested under forms of law, convicted and hung.

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When we first came to Nebraska we were set by difficulties. The country was already inhabited by several billion prairie dogs. The Indians weren't much of an obstacle when you compare them to the prairie dogs who seemed to be everywhere and didn't like the idea of us moving in on their territory. They were so thick, that they were always running in to each other, and looking over the broad prairies all you could see was millions [?] and millions of the curious yapping creatures, scuttling in and out of their holes.

Everytime we would build a fence or plant our crops we would have to first drive these prairie dogs away. They were wise little creatures and let us have a space of ground for our own crops so we wouldn't starve.

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In those days mirages on the prairie were frequent. Many an old settler was lost because of a mirage he had seen and had turned out to be a false vision. And the mirage was what saved Nebraska from the prairie dogs.

One day on the prairie there appeared a mirage of a large city. It happened about noon one hot day. I was standing out by my well with about a million prairie dogs around me. Suddenly, there appeared a vision of a large city in the distance. I knew it was a mirage but the prairie dogs didn't.

Now these billions of prairie dogs had been taking care of me seeing that I didn't progress very far on my claim and when they turned and saw that a city had been built (they thought) behind their backs, they just fell over and died with mortification. That is, most /of them did.

One time, at Swan City, Nebraska in the early seventies, was a blacksmith named, Jud Smith. Jud was pretty good at telling stories about how great his ancestors were. Jud didn't say anything about their brain power but he did boast plenty about their strength. Jud said his grandfather was so strong that he sued to spike his whiskey in good strong

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ale and it was nothing for him to have a quart of whiskey as an appetizer for breakfast. When he went on a drunk he always downed at least five gallons of whiskey. He said his granddad was so strong he never used a [hammer?] to drive [nails?] in a horses hoof but always used his bare fist. One time a cyclone hit the town and Jud's grandfather held his house, with one hand, so it wouldn't blow away. If there were any iron bars to bend, Jud's grandpap didn't waste any time heating but bent them over his knee. One had to be careful around Jud's granddad but because if he had to [be and a person?] 9 was caught in the path of his sneeze he was like or not to be blown across the town.

One time they had shot putting contest using cannon balls as the shot. When it came Jud's granddad's turn to cast the iron ball he picked it up and letting out a grunt which scared the horses all over town, he let it loose, the ball disappearing in the clouds. The ball was never found although the people wondered then they read in the papers the next week about a strange ball had been found buried on the Capitol grounds at Washington, D. C.